



# Collection & Acquisition Policy

# INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Parliamentary Archives is to provide an effective and efficient records management and archive service for each House of Parliament. To achieve this aim two of its key objectives are:

- to ensure that records created or held by Parliament which are worthy of preservation are selected for archiving.
- to acquire other records that contribute significantly to the understanding of the history and workings of Parliament.

These objectives feed into the corporate objectives of both administrations relating to the provision of information to the public about their proceedings, and the maintenance of their heritage assets, which include historic records.

Every day, Parliament creates thousands of records, only a tiny fraction of which will end up in the Parliamentary Archives, deemed worthy of permanent preservation. Since 1497, when the first Clerk of the Parliaments made the decision to store his newly-written acts of Parliament onsite at Westminster instead of sending them to the Chancery in London, the work of selection and storage has continued. The mechanism by which a Parliamentary record is selected for posterity is a delicate one, balancing on the one hand the need to preserve the authoritative evidence of the work of both Houses and records likely to be of interest to future historians, with the need to use repository space and other resources within the archive efficiently.

In general, an acquisition policy sets out criteria which inform selection decisions, and equally importantly, identifies material which falls outside the collecting scope of the archive. This is therefore a framework document which will be used as a point of reference by

the Parliamentary Archives in deciding whether to accept records for permanent preservation. However, this policy cannot hope to cover all eventualities. The Clerk of the Records retains the discretion to exercise judgement on the informational and historical significance to Parliament of collections offered to, or available for acquisition by the Archives, which - exceptionally - do not fall within the scope of this policy.

Since the 1994 revision of the Parliamentary Archives' acquisition policy there have been a number of significant developments which have highlighted the need for a more focussed approach to the acquisition and appraisal of records in future. These are:

### **The Parliamentary Records Management Policy**

A corporate policy is now implemented across both Houses of Parliament. The Policy is in accordance with good practice as set out by the international standard ISO15489:Records Management and in part one of the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Management of Records under Section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act (2000).

### **The Retrospective Conversion Project**

This has produced an online catalogue to the Archives' holdings. Retrospective cataloguing work has defined priority areas for collecting by identifying gaps in collections, subject themes and also developing criteria for the de-accessioning of material.

### **The Refurbishment of the Victoria Tower Repository**

The introduction of new air-conditioning plant and storage facilities

for the records in 2004 provided accommodation for existing collections and future accessions which conforms to the British Standard for Archival Storage and Display, BS5454. However, no extra space has been provided by the project, so it is imperative that in the future consideration be given to the most efficient use of shelving in the repository. This can be greatly aided by a coherent and detailed acquisition statement.

### **Political Archives Elsewhere**

There are now a significant number of specialist political archives in the United Kingdom, as well as political collections held by library special collections departments. Our collecting policies must also be informed by the arrangements for the deposit of records created by the Scottish Parliament and the devolved assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland. Consideration needs to be given to whether certain records offered to the Archives from outside Parliament would be better deposited at other institutions, for the benefit of the general public.

### **The Data Protection Act 1998**

The Data Protection Act 1998 places stringent measures on public bodies in relation to the storage and dissemination of personal information about individuals. Consideration must now be given to the requirements of the Act when assessing whether records containing personal data should be selected for permanent preservation in the Archives.

## **Digital Resources**

This policy must reflect the increasing use within Parliament of information which is created or primarily managed in digital form. In particular, it must take account of new types of information resource which can only meaningfully exist in digital form, such as websites or virtual reality tours. The Parliamentary Archives is currently addressing the particular challenges of managing and preserving digital information.

*This policy will be reviewed on a five year cycle, but the policy is a working tool and this pattern of formal reviews will not prevent improvements from being made in the interim.*

# STATEMENT OF COLLECTING POLICY

The Archives will acquire only records which meet one of the following seven criteria. In doing so, it seeks to provide a research resource for our generation and for future generations.

## INTERNAL RECORDS

**1. Key records created or held by the administrations of both Houses which provide evidence of the deliberations, decisions and actions of the House of Commons and the House of Lords in carrying out their legislative, scrutiny and judicial functions.**

**2. Key records created or held by the administrations of both Houses, relating to their management and administrative functions.**

## EXTERNAL RECORDS

**3. Selected records of other bodies which are Parliamentary in nature, *but which have not been created by either House.***

Such bodies are very limited in number, but also fall within the scope of the Archives' collecting. Examples of acquisitions in the past have included the high-level records of the Society of Clerks at the Table; the Association of Secretaries General of Parliaments; the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association; the History of Parliament Trust; and the Parliamentary Press Gallery. In making a decision about whether or not to acquire such records, they will be assessed against our key historical themes, and in each case only concise, high-level, records will be selected.

#### **4. The private papers of significant Parliamentary officials, or Members holding Parliamentary Offices such as Speakers of the House of Lords or House of Commons.**

Recent examples include the acquisition by private sale of the papers of Thomas Erskine May, and purchase at auction of the papers of Bryan Fell, both clerks in the House of Commons. In making a decision about whether or not to acquire such records, they will be assessed against our key historical themes, and in each case only concise, high-level, records will be selected.

#### **5. Parliamentary Records which have strayed from official custody.**

Older records which were created by Parliamentary staff and which may have been removed by their creators on retirement, or may have left official custody through theft or by accident will be reacquired where they fill gaps in record series or are of outstanding individual importance. The most significant example of repatriated records in the Parliamentary Archives are the Braye Manuscripts, records of the House of Lords removed by John Browne, Clerk of the Parliaments in the seventeenth century, and purchased by the House of Lords in the twentieth century. In making a decision about whether or not to acquire such records, they will be assessed against our key historical themes, and in each case only concise, high-level, records will be selected.

#### **6. Records with the same provenance as existing non-Parliamentary collections.**

Where stray records from the personal paper collections held in the Archives come onto the market or are offered to the Archives, consideration will be given to acquiring them to fill gaps in collections. They must have the same creator as existing collections, and be

significant in their own right. In making a decision about whether or not to acquire such records, they will be assessed against our key historical themes, and in each case only concise, high-level, records will be selected.

## **7. Architectural and Photographic Records.**

In order to enhance our holdings in this area, we have a particular focus at present on visual records which provide significant evidence of the appearance of the Parliamentary estate, members, staff and ceremonial and other occasions.

The Archives *no longer* acquires the following records:

- **Personal Papers of Politicians.**

In the past the Archives acquired substantial collections of politicians' papers including those of Lloyd George and Lord Beaverbrook. However with the development of major political archive collections in London, Oxford, Cambridge and elsewhere, it is more appropriate that in future the personal records of MPs or Peers should be offered to other archives in the UK where they can be accessed alongside the records of former colleagues or nearer to their constituencies.

- **Records of pressure groups, political journalists or records relating to politics in general, but not of Parliamentary provenance.**

The Archives will no longer collect records originating from outside the House of Lords or House of Commons which comment on, or seek to influence, Parliamentary deliberations, decisions or actions. The Archives is a repository for records of Parliamentary provenance, and is not a reference collection relating to all aspects



of Parliamentary and political history. There are now a number of more appropriate archives which collect such records.

- **Audio-Visual Records.**

A wide array of listening or viewing equipment is needed to make film and sound recordings available to the public. They are better stored and made available in a dedicated archive such as the National Film Archive. This arrangement may need to be reviewed in future, in the light of the increasing use of digital audio-visual formats, and Parliament's evolving capabilities to manage digital resources.

- **Public Records.**

Certain Cabinet Office records, particularly those of the Leaders of the House and the Whips' Offices, are created by government in the course of their Parliamentary business. These are public records and therefore fall under the control of the National Archives at Kew.

- **Records which meet criteria 1-7 above, but which have such irremediable defects that they are rendered unreliable, incomplete or inaccessible.**

Such defects might be lack of provenance, lack of authenticity, illegibility, extreme physical deterioration or other technical requirements which cannot be met. This also covers records of such physical size (either single items or whole collections) that it is not practical to store them in the Victoria Tower repository. For digital resources, this may include records which lack sufficient reliable metadata, or which are in formats which are not economically or technically feasible to preserve.

## HISTORICAL SELECTION THEMES

There will be certain records - both internal and external - where additional appraisal will be needed to assess their long-term informational and historical value. Where this occurs, the value of a record which falls within the scope of our collecting statement above will be assessed against our key historical themes, and in each case only concise, high-level, records will be selected.

The following themes have been identified as those most likely to prove of interest to historians of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Records which contain significant content in these areas will need to be appraised by the Archives (provided they fall into categories 1 to 7 in the *Statement of Collecting Policy*, above) to determine whether they should be selected for permanent preservation. A few examples of records of interest are given, but they are of course by no means exhaustive; it should be noted that historical evidence of this kind is often contained in records whose primary purpose was an entirely different one.

- A. **The impact of significant procedural changes on the workings of either House.** Examples might include details of new arrangements for a Speaker in the House of Lords following the abolition of the post of Lord Chancellor, or records of late-night staff travel showing decreased costs relating to changed sitting hours in the Commons.
  
- B. **The impact of government reform of the House of Lords or the House of Commons, and of devolution.** Examples might include the manifestoes of hereditary Peers written for the 1999 elections, or advice from Hansard to devolved assemblies setting up facilities for their own *Official Report*.

- C. **The changes arising from the UK's greater involvement in Europe.** Examples might include decisions to create new posts to support European Scrutiny work, or the response of the Refreshment Departments to European hygiene directives.
- D. **The impact of legislation which directly affects the Parliamentary administration.** Examples might include Parliament's policies and procedures for the implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 or the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- E. **The impact of, and protection of Parliament from natural disasters and human threats.** Examples might include wartime air-raid protection records; emergency evacuation plans in case of the Thames flooding; details of repairs to buildings after damage by terrorist activity; or protests within the Chambers.
- F. **The impact of strategic decisions regarding information technology and other technological advances on Parliament.** Examples might include records relating to the installation of the first photocopying or fax machines in Parliament, annunciator or broadcasting developments, Parliament's use of the World Wide Web, and business continuity records.
- G. **The role of women, ethnic minorities and other under-represented groups in Parliament, both in the Chambers and in the administrations.** Examples might include plans for the construction of lavatory facilities for the first women peers, or personnel policies relating to leave required for non-Christian religious festivals.
- H. **Significant developments in the Parliamentary Estate (for example, the building of new accommodation, or major restoration of historic parts).** Examples are the high-level project

documentation for the construction of Portcullis House in the 1990s, or photographic surveys portraying interiors of the Palace.

- I. State occasions, particularly coronations, lyings-in-state and visits by world leaders.** Examples include arrangements for the funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 2002, or for the state visit of Nelson Mandela in 1996.
  
- J. Parliament's relations with Government.** Examples might include records reflecting conflict over aspects of Parliamentary Privilege and committee scrutiny, or administrative involvement in political controversies or scandals.
  
- K. Engaging with the Public.** Examples include records relating to proposed visitor centres, outreach work and exhibitions.

# **METHODS OF ACQUISITION**

## **By Transfer (Internal Records Only)**

Records created, received and held by the administrations of the Houses of Parliament are subject to retention schedules which identify those records which are preserved permanently as archives, submitted to the Parliamentary Archives for appraisal or destroyed in accordance with good practice. Appraisal is carried out by a team comprised of archivists and records managers from the Parliamentary Archives.

## **By Donation or Bequest (External Records Only)**

The Archives will accept records by donation or bequest, provided they meet the criteria laid down at 3 to 7 above. Where collections offered do not meet the necessary criteria, the Archives can advise potential donors about alternative suitable places of deposit.

In making a decision about whether to accept such records, one of the factors which will be taken into consideration is the level of staff and financial resources which will be required to catalogue, store and conserve the collection offered. This will be balanced against the acquisition's historical importance. This is particularly the case where material may have to be closed for between 50 to 100 years to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 (for example, where there is a large quantity of correspondence containing names and addresses). In these cases, the historical worth of the records must be sufficient to justify the expense of their storage for several generations while not being available for use by the public.

The donor or executor will be expected to sign a deed of transfer, and the Archives will alert the owner to the fact that, after transfer, records

donated may be subject to a review of their historical value. Once acquired, the Archives will be free to make its own judgements and decisions about the appraisal and arrangement of the records for public use. Archives' staff will evaluate and select for disposal those records not deemed worthy of permanent preservation in the collection, returning such documents to the donor or executor if requested. The person transferring the records should provide as much detail as possible about of the provenance and custodial history of the records being donated at the time of the transfer.

### **By Purchase**

The Archives will seek to acquire records at auction or by private sale, provided they meet the collecting policy criteria laid down at 3 to 7, above. The auction house or person selling the records should provide as much detail as possible about of the provenance and custodial history of the records at the time of the sale.

### **On Deposit / Long Term Loan**

The Archives no longer accepts records on long term loan or deposit, due to space restrictions and limited staff resources. It is not cost-effective for the Archives to package, store, catalogue and make available to the public records which may be withdrawn from use in the future.

### **Copies of Original Records**

Only in exceptional circumstances are copies (photographic or digital) of original external records deposited with the Archives, and only if the possibility of acquisition by donation or purchase has been ruled

out. These circumstances are:

- that the records meet the criteria laid down at 3 to 7 above *and*
- that they are of national importance *and*
- that they will remain in private hands with no provision for public access *or* that they are only available outside the UK.

No copies of records held in other publicly-accessible archives or libraries in the UK will be accepted. If the originals of records in private hands are subsequently put up for auction, the Parliamentary Archives should be notified by the owner, and every effort should be made to purchase them. If the originals are purchased by another UK archive or library, the Archives will destroy its copies.

## **ACCESS TO RECORDS IN THE ARCHIVES**

The Archives is open to the general public all year round (apart from public holidays and two weeks' stocktaking in November) from Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm. In addition to historical records, defined in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 as records which are at least thirty years old, our holdings include more recent records identified as being worthy of permanent preservation in the Parliamentary Archives. A few records may be subject to exemptions applied by depositing departments under the Freedom of Information Act. Private papers in the custody of the Archives but owned by third parties are subject to access conditions set by their owners.



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